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Soviet Not Prepared to Cut U.N. Staff, Envoy Says

By ELAINE SCIOLINO
Special to The New York Times

UNITED NATIONS, N.Y., Sept. 12 — The Soviet Union is not prepared to comply with a Reagan Administration order to reduce the size of its mission to the United Nations by the beginning of next month, the chief Soviet delegate said today.

The delegate, Aleksandr M. Belonogov, speaking at a news conference, called the American order to reduce the size of mission employees from 243 to 218 by Oct. 1 illegal.

"You see, we consider the action by the United States Government as absolutely illegal and running contrary to the agreement between the United Nations and the United States Government when our organization was established," said Mr. Belonogov, who assumed the position of chief United Nations delegate in July. "And we still think that there is time for the United States government to change its mind."

When asked specifically if that meant the Soviet Union would do nothing to comply with the American order, he said, "If you would like to interpret it in that way, you may. But it's your conclusion."

A Nuclear Conference

Mr. Belonagov made his statements in answer to questions posed toward the end of a news conference called to brief journalists on Soviet policy to refrain from nuclear explosions on its territory. There appeared to be no connection between the press conference and the release today of Gennadi F. Zakharov, a Soviet employee at the United Nations, and of Nicholas S. Daniloff, an American journalist in Moscow to their respective governments, and American officials downplayed the significance of his remarks.

In fact, when Mr. Belonagov was asked what the next development in the Zakharov-Daniloff case would be, he said, "We do really hope this is a temporary phase. But at this moment, I am not in a position to indulge in any suppositions."

As for whether the Zakharov-Daniloff incident would damage Soviet-American relations, Mr. Belonogov said, "That all depends to what extent a particular government wants to make this matter worsen relations. As far as the Soviet Government is concerned, we are not interested in worsening Soviet-American relations. We are working for quite contrary aims.

Order From Reagan

"The sooner this episode is behind us, the better it will be for Soviet-American relations."

Last March, the Reagan Administration ordered the Soviet, Ukrainian and Byelorussian missions to the United Nations to reduce their staff by more than a third by April 1988, accusing them of spying and calling the size of their missions "a threat to national security."

The first phase of the reduction is to be completed Oct. 1, when the Soviet mission is to cut its staff from 243 to 218 employees. That deadline is regarded as a test case of the Soviet willingness to go along with an Administration decision designed to reduce the level of ability by the three missions to spy.

Asked what preparations he was making to implement the first cut, Mr. Belonagov said, "We are not in any stage of preparation for that."

American officials said they believe the Russians will probably comply with the order even though they will not admit it.

"The U.S. mission has nothing to indicate that the Soviets are not going to meet the time schedule, although we understand that they're not going to give up their legal position," said Richard C. Hottelet, chief spokesman for the American mission. "We also understand that the reductions are on schedule."

Mr. Hottelet added that "there have been discussions, there have been contacts" between American and Soviet officials on the subject.

United States officials have said little about Soviet compliance with the order, in part to allow any reduction to take place quietly.

At the time of the American order, a number of American legal experts questioned its legality, saying that the United States could order foreign diplomats from the country only in specific cases where it was proven that they had misused their positions. However, other experts said that the United States did have the right to demand that a mission's size is "reasonable" for the job it must perform.

The order called on the Soviet Mission to reduce its staff from 243 to 170 by April 1, 1988, and for Byelorussia and the Ukraine, Soviet provinces with separate membership in the United Nations, to reduce their staffs from 32 to 20 by April 1, 1988.

In response to the order, Secretary General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar called on both sides to resolve the matter through negotiations. If that failed, he could have convened a three-member tribunal to resolve the dispute, in accordance with the 1947 Headquarters Agreement, a treaty between the United States and the United Nations that determines the privileges and immunities of the United Nations headquarters.

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